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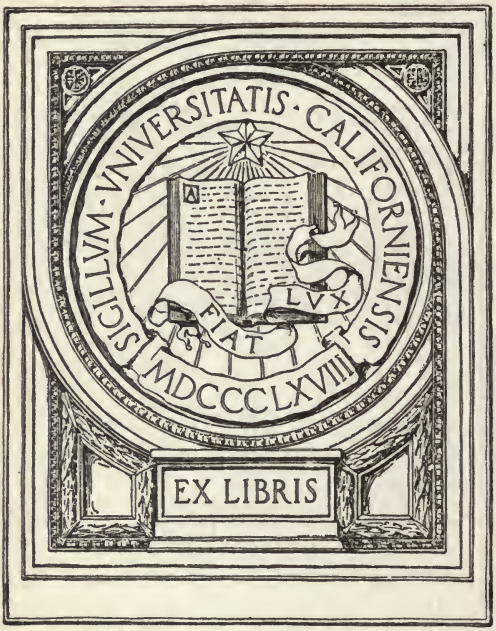
RECOLLECTIONS OF MEXICO AND BUENA VISTA E405 .1 .R26



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RECOLLECTIONS OF MEXICO

And the Battle of

BUENA VISTA,

FEB. 22 AND 23, 1847.

BY AN ENGINEER OFFICER,

ON ITS TWENTY-FOURTH ANNIVERSARY.

UNPUBLISHED COPY.
FROM THE MONTHLY MAGAZINE "OLD AND NEW,"
FOR JUNE AND JULY.

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RECOLLECTIONS OF MEXICO AND BUENA VISTA.

CHAPTER I.

[ALTHOUGH it has always been the intention of the writer to record for his own satisfaction his memories of the scenes occurring in Mexico, at or about the time of the battle of Buena Vista, this record might have been procrastinated, — just as repentance is too often said to be, — but for a feeling of duty towards an association of gentlemen, each of whom contributes for the general information from the stores of his own professional knowledge. Even now this is offered with some hesitation, because this battle, which appeared to us and to the country as of such great importance at the time, is [redacted] dwarfed into insignificance by the giant struggles of these later days, whose warriors were counted by millions, and their dead by hundreds of thousands, — which gave an emperor to reunited Germany, and a president to the re-United States. Yet this lesser struggle, where our soldiers were but as many thousands, and our dead as many hundreds, was still the bloodiest strife that our country had ever then known. And this victory likewise gave a president to our great country.

This narrative is offered really from personal recollections only, first written down within a very few days recently, as an offering to the association above alluded to. But the recollection of these events has so crowded upon the memory, that much may appear to be of minor detail and of lesser interest. Yet there may be an excuse for introducing many of these incidents which would scarcely become the graver page of history, except, perhaps, as its foot-notes, as it appeared there might be more of life and interest to the narrative, in the writer's being able to say 'I saw,' instead of 'I have read' or 'heard.' And all of this he may say he saw, or had from the eye-witnesses within a very few days after. Nothing is from the record of others, or even from his own letters, orders, or notes, excepting only the maps made by himself, and a glance at a single page of statistics from Captain (now General) Carlton's book, the only history of this battle as yet published.

It is perhaps at times more difficult in this profession than in any other to relate what has been seen, without appearing, however unconsciously, to play the the rôle of "*magna pars fui.*" It is more rare to write, than to fight, like the great Roman; to do both, the world's verdict gives but to himself.

But the subordinate position of a lieutenant must avert the suspicion of assumption here; while, as an engineer, the calls to the many various portions of such a field would make it a duty to see if possible, if not even to record, every circumstance that occurred.]

It will be remembered by our older friends, that the war of 1846–48 for Texas was mainly a Southern war, and principally for the benefit of a "domestic institution," now happily existing no more among us; though the North, as in duty bound, when the whole country was involved, bore its fair, full share in the struggle.

Yet, as showing what slight causes actually precipitated that war, I may mention, as of interest, a single sentence, that many years after I accidentally heard brought out at a dinner-table, from the speaker himself, Mr. Benton, which, as I believe, had more effect than all things else to bring on the actual conflict.

A barbarous war of nine years having been waged ineffectually by Mexico to reduce the revolted State of Texas, and the acts for annexation to the United States having been passed by Texas and the United States, Mr. Calhoun, then in the Sen-

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ate, had advised the President, Polk, to recommend that Texas should be held by us in armed neutrality, and the December Message of 1845 was actually written out accordingly. But Mr. Benton happening to walk from church that first Sunday in December with Mr. Polk, he remained closeted with him till two in the morning, and urged him against such a plan; his closing, and as it seems unanswerable argument, being the question, "Will you, then, sit it out with that Spanish race that has sat it out for one thousand years and conquered; — for three hundred years with the Visigoths, and after that for seven hundred years with the Moors?"

The result is known; and the two columns of attack were organized that winter, — one, of some two thousand men, under Gen. Wool, to strike through Texas upon the upper Rio Grande; and another, under Gen. Taylor, to enter Mexico by Matamoras near the mouth of that river.

The latter column, as is known, after the battles of Palo Alto and Resacca, near Matamoras, in May, 1846, and that of Monterey, some one hundred and thirty miles to the south-west, in September, found itself in possession of Saltillo, some fifty-six miles south-west of Monterey, and over one hundred miles from Comargo on the Rio Grande, at the commencement of the year 1847. In Gen. Taylor's front, or southward some twenty miles, at Agua Nueva, and under his orders, lay the column of Gen. Wool, which was resting after a long and circuitous march to reduce the Mexican states of Chihuahua and Coahuila at the north.

During the autumn of 1846, Gen. Taylor, after repeated and ineffectual calls for more troops to enable him to penetrate into the interior of Mexico towards the capital, hearing that another army was being prepared by Gen. Scott for an attack on the shorter land-route by Vera Cruz, with a magnanimity that is rare, perhaps unexampled, with commanding generals of armies, wrote to the Department (as I recollect he himself stated to me), that if they could not re-enforce him, as he had more men than were necessary simply to hold his positions, he could spare a portion of his troops for Gen. Scott's line; and he thought "they had better form one strong column, than keep up two weak ones."

How was this proposition met by Gen. Scott, who had the full power to organize his own column? I must speak it plainly, for justice to both those dead heroes requires it. Gen. Scott did as most other generals, it is true, under like circumstances have done and would do, with the natural human feeling that they must at least make themselves strong, at all hazards to others (as I could name several like instances in the war of the rebellion), — Gen. Scott withdrew every regular bayonet, the only disciplined infantry, from the column of Gen. Taylor, and ordered every battery of artillery but two (together of eight guns only) to join his army for Vera Cruz. These two batteries were Sherman's and Bragg's, of four pieces each; the third and last one ordered away by Scott, was Washington's of eight guns (originally of six, but it had two captured Mexican guns added to it by Lieut. (now Gen.) Kingsbury, the ordnance officer at this battle).

Santa Ana, the most able, as he was the most unscrupulous, of all the Mexican chieftains, was apprised of this immediately; for he knew all the movements and numbers of our troops as well as we did ourselves; and

he at once commenced the organization of the grandest army of trained troops that Mexico had ever known, to overwhelm, to put to death, as they would have done, the whole army of Gen. Taylor. I say put to death; for, besides this army of six to eight times our numbers in our front, he had some four thousand ranchero guerillas in our rear, the well-understood orders among them being, as prisoners admitted to me, to put to death every one they had power to kill. This even Santa Ana himself virtually admitted to Col. Bliss, our adjutant-general, on his personal application for an exchange of prisoners, saying "We have but three prisoners; the rest are dead." Indeed, I believe but one life was saved of all our men taken on that field, — an Illinois man, afterwards the master of my engineer train. Lieut. Sturgis and his dragoon taken by Miñon were the other two. There is no doubt that a defeat or rout in that battle must have been death to all, as had been the case in repeated instances, with the Texans, by that blood-thirsty race.

These remarks may be necessary for a better understanding of our position in January and the early part of February, 1847. At this time I became a personal witness of most of the events that took place, having landed at the Brazos in the latter part of January, where I found Gen. Scott and his staff, then organizing the regular troops that were coming down the Rio Grande in force, with Worth in command of them, and Robert E. Lee, Scott's favorite officer, as captain of engineers, all withdrawn from Gen. Taylor. And I carried up the news, which the General could not at that time credit (though fortunately the order was not received until after the battle), of the withdrawal of another, and that the largest, of the three batteries of artillery yet left with Gen. Taylor. Part of that very battery so ordered, O'Brien's guns, was captured on the field of Buena Vista, and afterwards retaken by Gen. Scott's army on the other line near Mexico.

Many may recollect the complete isolation of Gen. Taylor's command, and the consequent anxiety of their friends at home for many weeks even, after the favorable result of that battle. Secretary Marcy wrote urgent letters of alarm to Scott, one month after. I will mention some of the circumstances of the journey to join the General, to show how completely he was invested. At Comargo, the dépôt and then head of navigation on the Rio Grande, there was a belief that Gen. Urrea, with three thousand lancers, lay in our way to Monterey, to intercept all communication and to capture all trains. There were several such trains, of some forty to sixty wagons each, with six specie-wagons, and some twenty officers or more going to rejoin their regiments. I was requested to take the direction of these trains and of their encampments, &c.; to which I assented on condition that the teamsters should be armed, to strengthen, in case of necessity, our weak force of only one company of infantry as our escort.

Our marches, often by the designed delay of the train-masters, were from five to twelve miles a day only; and our camps for the night were made on three and a half sides of a rectangle, with the escort proper, at the opening. The treasure trains and officers' wagons were in two lines in the centre, and the train-wagons distributed in three lines round the square, closing intervals, and having the mules with their *defensive heels* outside their re-

spective wagons, altogether the best position for them, and greatly strengthening our defence. By this arrangement, though daily warned that we were to be attacked at night by Urrea, we safely made the week's journey to Monterey, being the last train or body of Americans of any size that passed over that route for one month or more.

Our train-masters were, some of them, the most accomplished of the villains that are always found among the camp-followers of an army in the field, — the chief wagon-master being afterwards, as I heard, the head of a gang of robbers on that very route; and the teamsters, with arms in their hands for their own defence, not being restrained by these train-masters (as they could not be by the small volunteer escort), committed such outrages upon the inhabitants along the route, especially near the half-way village, Cerralvo, that I declined to retain control of the train for the last day or two. The teamsters of the next train up from Comargo, some ten days after, having been refused those arms, were destroyed by the very forces that had threatened our own route. The animosity of the Mexicans had been aroused to such a degree, that, as I recollect it, not a single teamster out of the eighty men escaped. The lancers riding rapidly down the line speared every man, as he sat on his mule or wagon-box; and then break-up the wagons, after plundering them, they piled up the bodies with the débris, and emptying the tar-pots on the heads of the victims, they fired and consumed them in one common mass, — one of the most frightful episodes of that barbarous war, — of aggression I must say, on our part, though perhaps mainly justifiable from being waged against such a savage race.

I may add here, that no other train passed this route till many days after the battle, when the down-train, with the full despatches, even after victory, as was necessary still, was escorted by a battalion of infantry and two pieces of artillery. The previous knowledge of our success was given by slips of paper only, carried by bribed Mexicans, of whom five in all, as reported, were started from Monterey; and of these but two reached Comargo, the first, leaving with the paper tied under the heavy mane of his almost wild horse, which he said no one could catch but himself. When pursued by the guerillas, he feigned to fall from this horse, which bore away the tell-tale despatch; while a thorough search of his clothing revealed nothing. His ready excuse of a visit to a sick son at Comargo being accepted, he was released; and after two days spent in recovering the animal, at length he made the journey — an affair usually of one day for a horseman — in five days, and brought the first news of our success that reached the United States.

The usual penalty of these Mexicans detected as our spies or couriers, was *hanging* alive by *the heels* to the trees by the road-side. A few weeks after this, the withered remains of one of these couriers (sent up by Col. Morgan of Ohio from Comargo) were discovered, so suspended, with the appearance of death in great agony, the despatches having been detected in their place of deposit, sewed up between the inner and outer sole of the shoe.

Within a day or two after our arrival at Monterey, with the large train as described, as we found no troops or escort en route to Saltillo, and we were anxious to reach the advanced forces as early as possible before the

expected battle, Capt. T. W. Sherman (now Gen. Sherman, who lost his leg at Port Hudson) with myself, decided to start without escort. We had with us one other person, Dr. Gregg,[1] as a companion, and he but for a few miles only. We had trusted greatly to his twenty-two revolver charges; but he soon left us, to visit a Mexican friend near the route.

We rode along the fifty miles, through the robber pass of the Rinconada, with scarcely a suspicion of especial danger, though constantly meeting parties of five to ten or fifteen Mexicans, mostly herdsmen (while some, as we had reason to know afterwards, were robbers), who had been warned by their people, and were removing their flocks and cattle from the vicinity of the expected contest. The withdrawing of these herds, as we found on reaching camp, was the first of the assured signs of the approach of the attacking force, of which the rumors, in most doubtful shape, had been rife in those camps for many weeks.

I reached the head-quarter camp at Agua Nueva in the first week of February, and joined the staff as the assistant to the other military engineer, Bvt.-Major, the late Gen. Mansfield (since killed at Antietam). I may here mention, on reporting to Gen. Taylor, a mark of that kindness of his which endeared him so much to all, — the invitation to his mess till my own arrangements could be made, — a courtesy of which the value can be fully known only by one who has reached an army in the field with only his clothing and blankets, and which, offered by a commanding general to one of his lieutenants, cannot be forgotten.

This Agua Nueva was a small village or collection of huts of adobes, the large unburnt bricks of the country. It was about twenty miles in advance, or south, of Saltillo; and the road passed through a narrow valley, in which was the hacienda farm and pass of Buena Vista, four to five miles from Saltillo.

The camp at Agua Nueva was in the broad eastern end of a narrow valley, extending to the west, and where the last running water was to be found in the journey from Saltillo south for one hundred and thirty to one hundred and fifty miles beyond, and towards the large and rich city of San Luis Potosi, which had been the objective point of attack by Gen. Taylor. This ranch was the central position of a dark and bloody ground, on the main mountain-gorge pass from Central to Northern Mexico, in which, within a half-day's ride north or south, this century has witnessed some five or six bloody battles, or massacres, besides those of Monterey at its debouch at the north. At eight miles south of Agua Nueva, in 1810, the Mexicans under Hidalgo defeated the Spaniards under Cordero. In 1811, about sixteen miles south-east, the Mexican Gen. Royon defeated the Spaniards under Melgara. In 1841, two miles south af Saltillo, the Mexicans and Indians had a battle; and in 1842, four or five miles south-west, Col. Jordan of Texas fought the Mexicans: while in January, 1847, Majors Gains and Borland, of our forces, were captured at Encarnacion by the Mexicans; and, as it proved, in February, 1847, this battle of Buena Vista, the crowning contest of them all, was fought five miles south of Saltillo.

[1] This Dr. Gregg, the author of an interesting work, "The Commerce of the Prairies," was a daring explorer and prominent Mexican trader; but, after many years of exposure among the Mexicans and savages, he was killed, a few years later, by the Indians of California.

The Hacienda of Encarnacion, thirty miles south of Agua Nueva, was an "estancia," or stock-ranch, supplied with a bitterish but drinkable water from two very deep wells, worked by mules. These wells supplied the many thousands of the flocks and herds that grazed upon the adjacent mountains, and resorted hither once or twice a week only, during the dry season of six or eight months each year without rain. The slight dews upon the grass enabled the animals to subsist for many days without water. And this necessary of life was obtained only from these wells, or the "tanks" formed by dams in the mountain gorges, that collected and retained the water of the rainy season for months, and sometimes till the rains of the succeeding year.

This Encarnacion was an isolated farm-fortress in fact; for its high corral walls, as well as a masonry parapet at the roof, were loop-holed for defences against the raids of the Comanches, whose custom was to sweep down rapidly in parties of tens or hundreds, mounted upon the fleetest horses to be found; and, if the villages were unprotected, they would seize the plunder most desired, in a stay of a few minutes only, murder the men and old women, and carry off the young women and girls, and the boys of ten or twelve, for slavery, or adoption into their respective tribes. The terror that these Indians inspired in the Mexicans was indescribable. They feared fifty Indians, on account of these cruelties, more than three hundred Americans, though fifty Americans would attack and defeat hundreds of the savages. The rapidity of their attack may be well judged of, when, in one of their raids on Agua Nueva, after our army had removed towards Saltillo, our careless picket was surprised: one of them barely escaped with his life by mounting his horse, and forcing him to break his halter by the application of the cruel Mexican spur, — a weapon whose sound alone is so arranged as to urge the animal on all ordinary occasions.

This ranch of Agua Nueva was one of the large number of farms into which the country is divided; some with many thousands of cattle and horses and of sheep and goats attached to and dependent upon them for care and protection; while others were villages of hundreds of *peons*, — the peasantry of the country, who are virtually slaves for life to the *ricos*, or rich men.

The owner of Agua Nueva, and of the larger portion of these ranches and villages for some two hundred miles or more to the north-west, was one Don Jacobo (or Jacob) Sanchez, a gentleman of education and breeding, though nearly a black Indian in appearance. He was the son, by an Indian woman, of a shrewd and unscrupulous Spanish-Mexican lawyer, who acquired, often unjustly it was thought, these immense properties in the troublous times of the first revolts from Spain. Don Jacobo we sometimes saw in Saltillo, where he had his town mansion; though he generally resided at his hacienda, some thirty miles south-west, where he lived in princely style, with his private band of musicians for his own amusement. The *hacienda* is a large and extensive plantation, with the mansion of the owner generally; while the *ranch* is the small farm, or peasant village. About one hundred miles west of Agua Nueva was the vineyard hacienda of Parras. This Parras was owned by a noble-spirited

gentleman, Don Manuel Ibarro, the master of two thousand *peons*. He had been at school in the United States, at Bardstown Ky., with the son of Henry Clay, a lieut.-colonel of Gen. Wool's forces at the time that command passed through Parras, *en route* to Saltillo. The true and cordial Spanish-Mexican embrace was given to the colonel by Don Manuel, and a hearty welcome to our troops; and our officers could hardly restrain him from turning the whole army into his wine-cellars in his excess of hospitable feeling He, with many of the best Mexicans, had an intense hatred of the tyranny of Santa Ana, and held himself ready for resistance to him.

As instances of the wealth at command of these *ricos* in that country, I would mention, that we were told of one gentleman, who, when Santa Ana's army started from San Luis to cross the arid desert to attack us, had presented five thousand mules to that general to transport water for the troops; and of another, who had mounted a whole regiment of lancers on horses of one color, and that no common color for that animal, — nankeen, — as a present to his country.

It may be proper to mention that the haciendas of these *ricos*, especially those not their usual homes, when they had such, were generally under the charge of an "administrador," of the class gentleman, with a "mayor-domo," a sort of upper butler, under him, to direct all the lesser details and lower servants. And such mayor-domos were generally in charge of the smaller haciendas, "estancias," or larger ranches. The next class, the rancheros, or small farmers, generally the smallest kind of farmers, were of the mixed white and Indian blood of all shades, with the Indian largely predominating. The next and lowest class were the *peons*, of the same blood and origin with the rancheros, being the household and personal servants, the herdsmen, &c., the actual tillers of the soil for others, and virtually, though not nominally, slaves, as completely as our own blacks at the South have been. Their masters always furnished them their few purchasable necessaries "on account," for which they were almost always too ready to incur the indebtedness. For these sums of some twenty dollars to forty dollars only, which they scarcely ever expected or attempted to pay, their service, and even their personal liberty, was compromised. If attempts were made to evade payment by escaping to a distance, the alcades, or other officers, had the right and the duty to arrest and return them, with the power even of corporal punishment. At Monterey and other places, I was told that our officers, by the payment of such small sums, freed many excellent working men and women. In many cases, most excellent household servants, female cooks, &c., had been held for such amount to the thraldom from which they had had no hope of escaping during their lives.

In the broader valley of Agua Nueva, well supplied with running water, — sometimes wanting for thirty to fifty miles in these mountain ranges, — lay the camp of Gen. Taylor, with about twelve hundred to fifteen hundred men; and quite near, in a separate camp, were the troops that Gen. Wool had brought from Monclova at the north-east, of nearly double the number of Gen. Taylor's forces; though all were under his command. Besides this, a force of about six hundred to seven hundred was at the depot at Saltillo. All was

wild rumor in these camps as to the designs, position, and numbers of the enemy, with absolutely nothing of certainty known.

Yet even if Santa Ana was really in front (and he was actually at that time with his large force approaching, if not really at, Encarnacion, within less than thirty miles, or half a day's ride of us), it was believed that we could meet and resist him successfully in the one or two supposed passes of these mountains south, within three or four miles, of Agua Nueva.

The reconnoissances of the engineers now made daily of their own motion, and without Gen. Taylor's order, though instantly reported to him, soon developed the fact that these mountains were passable in every direction, and that the camps in this valley were in a most dangerous position, where a largely superior force, such as we had full reason to believe was being organized in our front, could pour down upon us and overwhelm us, coming from different directions through these many mountain passes.

Those reports that we made soon gave an earnest anxiety to our usually imperturbable general; and during the week immediately before the battle, reconnoitring parties, some of them in large force, were kept constantly out, to obtain information, although with but little success till the very last moment. One large party of two hundred and fifty to three hundred cavalry and artillery, under Capt. (afterwards Col.) May, came in after thirty-six hours' absence, with wild rumors of having been driven in, which were without doubt incorrect; for though a picket-officer sent out by him, Lieut. (now Gen.) Sturgis, and one or two men, were lost, they were not attacked, and no enemy was really seen. This was in most marked contrast to our own situation, where every movement, and the details of each command we had, were well known to the Mexicans. It was stated, and as I believe correctly, that the very Friday, three days before the battle, there were within and around our camps intelligent Mexican officers, disguised as peons or rancheros, offering for sale the sugars and fruits of the country. They had actually ascertained the numbers of regiments of each arm, whether of cavalry or infantry, whether of regulars or volunteers, and the exact numbers of men in each, to within some two or three per cent, as well as the actual number of the pieces of our artillery. Gen. Taylor, with his avowed belief in the impossibility of keeping such matters concealed in an enemy's country, could never be prevailed upon to take the usual precautions of chains of sentinels or pickets around our camps, or even at our market-places, where the peasants of the country were encouraged to furnish supplies. In the uncertainty of our situation, however, still further reconnoissances were made, and scouts sent out, especially a small "spy company," organized for the purpose under Ben. McCullough, since killed in Missouri as a rebel general. Much confidence was felt in him and his men, as old Texas rangers; and our final certain information of the actual near presence of the enemy came by some of his men on the night of the 20th of February. Upon this Gen. Taylor broke up his camp on the next morning, having evidently changed what I believe to have been his previous intention of awaiting the assault of the enemy at that point. But though tents were struck, and wagons were loaded and

in line, and officers in some cases mounted, Gen. Taylor, with the determination not to be driven from his camp by one of the thousand false rumors, would not start, as he stated, "until McCullough himself returned."

He came back about two, P.M., and reported that he had been within Santa Ana's guard-fires, near Encarnacion, and that the broad plain around that hacienda was covered for miles with the troops, artillery, and mule-trains of this immense army.

We at once moved rapidly to our rear, towards Saltillo, for some fifteen miles, to the gorge of Buena Vista, which no one could pass, with any military eye, without selecting it as an admirable defensive point. The troops of Gen. Wool were here halted for encampment; while Gen. Taylor's smaller special force proceeded on to near Saltillo, where it went into bivouac that night. On the morning of the 22d of February, Gen. Taylor arranged for a garrison of some six hundred men to guard the city, and restrain the people, and also manned a small redoubt near his camp on the high plateau immediately south of the town, and commanding it, which he placed under the command of Major Webster. He desired the engineers to go both together (remarking, "two heads were better than one") to Wool's camp, and call for Rucker's squadron of dragoons (as May had reported his horses as too tired), and that they should then proceed to reconnoitre the passes south of our late camp, towards Encarnacion. That journey we were saved, as will be seen; for starting from camp from half-past seven to eight, A.M., Major Mansfield and myself rode leisurely along, reconnoitring, taking the bearings, &c., and sketching the obstacles, cross-gullies, and hills on our route, till, on nearing the hacienda of Buena Vista, about nine, A.M., we met a dragoon on a gallop with despatches in his hand, who called out to us, "The enemy are in sight." We sprung our horses forward by the side of Wool's camp on our left, then aroused and in great alarm; we saw Capt. Washington's battery moving to the front, — to the narrow road pass of some forty feet only between the steep spurs of the hills on our left, and the precipitous gullies on the right, and over half a mile beyond the houses of Buena Vista; and we were brought up at about eight hundred yards farther by finding some eighteen hundred of the Mexican cavalry already up, and forming a line to their right, within a half mile of us.

I would say now, that we were perfectly astonished that such a body of troops could have approached so near without our men being in a position to meet them; and we were surprised that the news should have been despatched to Gen. Taylor, as we personally witnessed, only some fifteen minutes previously.

From what we afterwards learned, it appears that Santa Ana had taken up his line of march almost immediately after McCullough left his camp, and without McCullough's suspecting it. And he was pushing on to attack us in our camp that very night; for his advance had made the journey of twenty-five miles to the mouth of the pass into the Agua Nueva valley, and five miles farther it came upon the site of our camp where our trains were still loading up with grain, at eleven o'clock, P.M. The wheat-stacks were burned, and by their glaring light the mule-teams started, and came in on a hard run, fifteen miles to Buena Vista, arriving between three to five in the morning. As this

certainly must have been communicated to Gen. Wool, why a scout or reconnoitring party was not sent to the front at once, to learn the situation, and why even this information was not sent to Gen. Taylor immediately, cannot be conceived. It was such a blunder, that we were all saved from actual destruction only by an equal blunder of the Mexican commander or by the "providence of God." For if that very cavalry we saw, instead of halting, and slowly forming a cross-line towards the mountain on their right, at a distance, as we saw it, within one mile of where Gen. Wool's army lay, had but pressed rapidly forward at the first, into our then disordered camp of volunteers of less than double their own number, but few would have been left to tell the tale; and our force, of one half those numbers, at Saltillo would of course have shared the same fate.

The ground on which we found ourselves — this field of Buena Vista, — was, as it then appeared to me, one of the most broken and difficult positions on which any battle had ever been fought. It was situated in the valley, about one-third the distance from Saltillo, twelve miles, to the ranch of La Encantada ("the enchanted," from its mountain echoes), a valley of perhaps two miles in width at each extremity, narrowed at Buena Vista to near half that distance. The east side on our left, at about one thousand yards, was bounded by the Sierra or mountain range, thirty-five hundred feet or more in height; and the right, at six hundred yards, by "lomitas," or hills, of some two hundred to four hundred feet, just beyond which were the higher mountains. On our left, as the road ran nearly through the middle of the valley, there was a sort of elevated plain, with cross valleys formed by the rains and floods of ages, of fifty to one hundred feet depression; while on our right was a lower steppe, or valley of bottom land, with recent deep gullies, or "canons," with precipitous sides, from ten to twenty or thirty feet deep.

This Buena Vista, or rather the battle-field, was about half a mile south of the ranch, at the pass of "Angostura," as that field was called by the Mexicans; though the original name was "la Chupadera," or the "sucking-place," as cattle were able at times to obtain there a little water that oozed from the spurs of the hills near the road.

A model plan of the actual field of conflict can be best conceived by placing both hands flat upon a table, while facing to the westward, with the fore-arms raised to some forty-five degrees. The fore-arms would indicate the mountain-range; the right hand, with the fingers slightly separated, and having the thumb near the fore-finger, will very nearly represent our own original ground. And the left, with the thumb touching the right wrist, and the fingers inclined towards the right fore-finger, will show the ground or ridges occupied by the Mexicans; our own main field of fight having some three hundred yards breadth at the wrist, or base of the mountains, and five hundred at the heads of the valleys, being thus nearly a third of a mile square. These valley heads were about five hundred yards from the mountains, and nearly the same distance from the road at the middle of the valley; the spurs near the road being some eighty to ninety feet above it, and rising gently eastward towards the plain, which sloped up to the mountain to perhaps double that height. These slopes were passable in all directions, —

though with difficulty in the steepest parts,— by both men, and the small Mexican horses, as were these mountain spurs also, for the most part.

At the commencement of the main action on the 23d, we occupied the whole of the position I have referred to, as represented by the right hand; O'Brien's pieces being in position to enfilade the advanced spur, or thumb, with the Second Indiana Regiment, under Col. Bowles, to protect them. Our outlook station, with a small picket, was at the extremity of the next ridge, or fore-finger; and at the foot of the second spur back from that were five guns of Capt. Washington's battery, guarding the narrow pass of the road, which was protected by a small breastwork, hastily thrown up on the spur itself, and manned by Illinois troops under Lieut.-Col. Wetherford. Our usual route to the main battle-field, and the only route for artillery, was by the small rear spur, represented by the little finger. At sunset on the 23d, these two last-named spurs were all that was left to us; and the Mexicans had a large battery, protected by a heavy regiment drawn up in position at the wrist, or mountain foot, to enfilade the whole of the main field of the contest, if they had charged down, as we at the time expected.

It is proper to mention here one or two peculiarities of this high region, which greatly affected, if they were not the main cause of, our greatest disaster that day, — the massacre of nearly two hundred men at the close of the contest. The rarified atmosphere here, at six thousand feet elevation, was such, that to us, whose constitutions were not accustomed to it, but slight exertions and short marches caused great fatigue and weariness; and the clearness of the air almost wholly changed or destroyed all preconceived notions of distances from the gradations of light and shade. In standing on any one of these ridges, of which several might lie before us in succession at every two hundred or three hundred yards, the eye would detect nothing from which to suspect that the surface was other than a continuous plane, the air was so clear.

But to return from this description to the position for reconnoissance that we had chosen, the lookout point above mentioned. Major Mansfield gave me his directions to remain there, and report to the general in the rear the numbers and kinds of troops of the enemy, as they came up and formed in front; adding personal requests, in case he fell, even showing me the peculiarities of his teeth to recognize him even in decay, as he stated, for he seemed to have anticipated the death upon the battle-field which fell to his lot some fifteen years later. He then mounted and rode to the rear to assist in organizing and arranging the troops to meet the attack, which was hourly expected during the whole of that day. I remained at that position till night-fall, with a small infantry picket, and counted the regiments as they came up as far as possible, and the pieces of artillery, &c., and sent the news in by dragoons from a mounted squad under cover of the spur in my rear. Some forty pieces of artillery were reported, with some eighteen to twenty bodies of infantry, mostly regiments, and sixteen regiments of brilliantly uniformed cavalry, drawn up in two lines on dress-parade that afternoon. I recollect distinctly now the music of their bugles ringing sweetly through all our camp from this parade. These regiments, of some four hundred men

only, as we afterwards learned, gave them a body of cavalry of some six thousand to seven thousand; and they were their best and best-officered veterans; and their infantry and artillery troops, though we judged them to be more at that time, made up a total force of some twenty-five thousand altogether. To withstand them, we had of our army all told on the field, both of Gen. Taylor's and Wool's command, three batteries, of sixteen six-pounder pieces in all, and two hundred and sixty men of regular artillery, two squadrons of regular dragoons of some two hundred men, and fifteen companies (some eight hundred men) of poorly disciplined volunteer cavalry from Kentucky and Arkansas, to a great extent mounted on mules, as they had sold their horses to the artillery in the expectation of an early muster-out, and return home. We had also some six regiments of volunteer infantry of some thirty-four hundred men, good, bad, or indifferent, as to discipline. In all, with the sixteen guns, we had some forty-six hundred men; of whom about two-thirds only stood their ground to resist the assaults of these heavy Mexican forces, organized from the most experienced veteran regiments of Mexico, and with heavy siege-artillery even, of far superior power to our own light guns.

An incident of the afternoon's reconnoissance shows the difficulty of controlling new troops till fairly under fire; as it also illustrates the little danger from the fire of artillery, if you watch the pieces and have cover; an incident precisely such as occurred to Major Mansfield at the battle of Monterey, which he had told but a day or two before. While there with his glass, reconnoitring the "Black Fort" near that city, with a picket of Texans to guard him, he looked, as he said, "directly into the muzzles of three guns" pointed at him, and ordered his party to keep down, or leave him, that they might not draw this fire. As they did not heed him in their anxiety to see what was going on, he found a little hollow he could drop into, and continued his observations, until his party at length brought upon them the fire of each of these three guns in succession; the major dropping under cover each time and immediately rising. After this, he was left unmolested, while he found his guard more obedient. Precisely the same thing occurred at this lookout on the afternoon of the 22d. For an hour or more the muzzles of three guns bore upon us from an opposite ridge some four hundred yards distant; and the men were cautioned to keep down, and to watch and take cover, to which they paid no attention, in their eagerness to see the forming of the infantry for an attack over the mountain spurs on our left. When they were cautioned "down," at the smoke of the first gun, most carefully aimed, they escaped with a few slight injuries from the stones thrown up; and, as the second and third guns had no more effect, we were left in quiet, and this guard became as obedient as children.

As to our troops in rear, Gen. Taylor, having made his arrangements for the security of Saltillo, and learned by the courier we had seen of the near approach of the enemy, had arrived on the field not far from noon of that day, and had the distribution of the forces completed, which had been in part provided for previously by his second in command, Gen. Wool. O'Brien's section of artillery covered our front and right; and the Illinois troops, under Bissel and Harden, pro-

tected our left, at the foot of the nearest spur of the mountain-range.

While these arrangements were being made, about two, P.M., on the afternoon of this day, when the troops of the enemy had arrived, and formed in large force in our front, a flag was sent in by the President-General Santa Ana, to Gen. Taylor, demanding the surrender of himself and all his troops; to which the simple reply sent back was, "I have the honor respectfully to decline your proposition.

Z. TAYLOR."

Towards the latter part of the afternoon, a force of a full division of Mexicans was started up the steep mountain spur on the east, a thousand feet and more above us, with the hope of pouring down upon and overwhelming our left; and, as those columns formed, we heard the loud cheers of our men, as that day and its memories, the 22d February, was called out to them. This contest of musketry, almost among the clouds, continued for some two hours, with no result whatever, other than the loss of some four hundred to five hundred men killed and wounded, as acknowledged by the Mexicans, and but five slightly wounded on our part. Gen. Taylor remarking, as I was told, that "He hoped they would have a few more such trials in learning to fire down hill;" accurate firing being almost impossible down a mountain side, as is well known to hunters and marksmen.

With the closing in of night, the enemy on the heights were withdrawn, that mountain skirmish being the only attempt at fighting for the day. At the earliest dark, our pickets were thrown out well in advance even of the lookout position of the day; for a small knoll was seized within some two hundred yards of the advance battery of the Mexicans, which insured an ample warning in case of any night attack. Within a few minutes after, the Mexicans attempted to secure the same knoll; but their leading man was captured, whose sword, the first trophy on that field, I was able to secure, with the prisoner.

The night of the 22d was passed quietly, in the thoughts and preparations for the morrow, with both armies. A proposition was made by an engineer officer who knew the ground, through Gen. Wool to Gen. Taylor, for a night attack, with the offer to guide it from our front, along the road, "after midnight and the setting of the moon;" but he declined, from the fear of the confusion incident to such assaults in the darkness.

CHAPTER II.

Early in the morning of the 23d, a small parapet was thrown up in front of Washington's battery, the roadway being closed by wagons filled with stones; and at the earliest light I resumed my position in the advance with the mounted orderlies to watch and report the movement at their left, near which appeared to be their head-quarter position. By 7, A.M., or a little later, a large and brilliant group of officers, who, as we afterwards learned, were Santa Ana and his staff, came out on their advanced spur near the road, some four hundred yards from me. I noticed their horses, with their showy trappings, and several large and beautiful greyhounds gambolling round them. After a brief observation of our lines, they retired, and their infantry columns were rapidly formed for attack; and, after another ineffectual salute to our position, of three guns in succession, the column moved forward upon our centre. Having sent in full notice of these movements to our right, and being then unable to return by the road, I passed up that advanced spur to our left (against which a second column was forming), to join and report to Gen. Taylor. This column at the road moved forward against Washington's battery; but the fire from his pieces repulsed them at a distance of some five hundred yards, between the first and second ridges in advance, or just in rear of our lookout spur. The horse of Santa Ana was killed under him in this charge, the only one attempted here during the day. Near noon, a most daring, hairbrained reconnoissance was made by a single Mexican officer up to within sixty yards of the battery; when our advance sentinel was about to lay a hand on his bridle, he turned his horse, and fled under our infantry fire from the hill. He was successful in riding back to his lines, but was killed later, in the last charge of the afternoon. Major Washington forbade the fire of his guns on "so brave a fellow."

On getting up to the plain, at our left and front, I found that Gen. Taylor had not yet arrived; while all was anxiety at the sight of the immense masses of Mexican infantry, their bright arms glittering in the early morning sun, that were seen approaching, under the fire of their heavy guns, from the ridge just across the narrow valley. I turned to our rear to seek the staff, and met my friend Capt. Lincoln, Wool's adjutant-general, on a gallop to the front. My greeting of 'Buena Vista!' with the right arm pointing to the rear, was responded to with his right arm forward, and "Buena Vista!" which was probably the last exclamation of his life except his closing cheer.

As I passed onward, I first met Col. Belknap, moving quietly along under a perfect hail of musketry, and next found Gen. Taylor and his staff, as they came upon the plain from Saltillo, where the anxiety of the General had carried him during the night to assure himself again of the proper disposition of the troops there.

We had scarcely moved a hundred yards upon the plain, when Capt.

Bragg rode up with the exclamation, "General, they are too strong for me, —they are six pieces to my two!" Upon this Gen. Taylor authorized him to withdraw to a safer place. As he turned to join his battery he saw me, and, grasping my hand, cried out, "I give you joy. I shed a tear for you just now. I thought I saw you dead." I followed him, and saw at the feet of the horses of one of his pieces all that was left of the gallant Lincoln, so recently in full and joyous life. My first impulse was to save his sword, as of priceless value to those who loved him; and I carried it with his pistol to our field-hospital under the edge of the plain, for safety. Upon returning some short time after, and finding his body still left where he fell, I had that also taken off the field. He had pressed forward as I passed him, to the front of Bissell's regiment, then forming to support a section of artillery under Thomas, and to meet the charge of the advancing columns. Riding along their front, he turned back to their left and rear to cheer them on, with the words, "Come on, my brave Illinoisians, and save this battery." In the storm of musketry that then rained down upon them, one ball struck him in the waist, another entered the back of his head; and drooping slowly forward, he was caught by a captain of the charging regiment, who passed him into the arms of his orderly; and he was laid upon the ground, without a groan or a word. After waiting several weeks, I sent a long letter to his friends, giving them every detail, and with it flowers which had blossomed on the spot where he fell. Long may such flowers bloom over this gallant son of a noble race of Massachusetts, the names of whose heroes and statesmen still glitter among the brightest on her rolls of fame!

The arrangement of our troops for the battle which had then commenced was, very briefly, as follows: the plain referred to was held by us in force, to receive the main assaults of the enemy; for our right was felt to be secured by Washington's battery and the steep interlaced gullies beyond it; and our left was protected by the high Sierra range, if we could hold the plain at the mountain foot; for which three pieces under O'Brien (a part of Washington's battery) held our right centre, with Bowles's Second Indiana Infantry as guard. A part of Bragg's battery was in rear of our right centre; a part of Sherman's battery under Thomas, with Bissell's Illinois regiment, and McKee's Kentucky regiment, was at the heads of the gullies, with Lane's Indiana and Harden's First Illinois. The bulk of the remaining infantry regiments were at first under cover in rear of and at the edge of the plateau; and in the wide ravines in the rear were Humphrey Marshall's five companies of Kentucky volunteer cavalry, Jeff Davis's Mississippi regiment, Gen. Taylor's escort, and eight of Yell's regiment of Arkansas cavalry, being held as a kind of reserve, with the two squadrons of regular cavalry.

The storm of fire under which Lincoln had fallen came upon us from the main and partly successful column of attack against our centre on the plain, pushed forward by the Mexicans immediately after their failure on our right, at the road; its approach being by the way of our short advanced spur (the *thumb* of the model of position suggested). It was at first repelled by O'Brien's pieces, which enfiladed the upper part

of this ridge. Having cleared the space on his front, O'Brien ordered the advance of his guns, when the heading of the horses to the rear, "to limber up," appears to have caused an alarm to Col. Bowles, and given him the idea that they were preparing to retreat; and in his ignorance and ill-judgment, rather than cowardice, he ordered his regiment to the rear, when in fact they had lost but five men. The regiment moved at first only after repeated orders, and by companies even, till once fairly in retreat, when it became a flight to them, although fortunately to them only; for though rallied in part by several officers of the staff, Maj. Dix, Capt. Linnard, and myself, they never again acted that day as an organization. The bitter shame and burning disgrace of this unnecessary rout, caused by the blunder of this ignorant colonel, was deeply felt for months and years. Among their blackest, saddest days may be counted that of their departure for home when relieved by the new troops, — a day to all the other regiments there so gay and joyous. For, as all the other regiments filed by in succession, the battalions of the new columns, consisting of some six thousand men, turned out on parade, with presented arms, and saluted as it passed with martial music and loud cheers. But the Second Indiana Regiment marched by in the sadness and silence of their own grieved hearts, while the men of all these battalions remained in their tents. This is perhaps among the most sorrowful memories of the war.

When I reported the difficulty of rallying these men to Gen. Taylor, he said, "Call upon their State pride, call upon their State pride: they will not resist that."

This was tried a short time afterwards, with some fifty or sixty stragglers at our field hospital, — with the call, "Up! up! we want you; your State wants you." Seeing that no one moved, the inquiry was made, "What State are you from?" A lazy-looking rascal, after coolly looking all round upon the others, answered "Well, sir, we are from various States, if you must know." The General acknowledged himself beaten.

The flight of this regiment at once opened our centre to the enemy, for this retreat was the signal for renewing their assault; and O'Brien left alone, at the very moment of his intended advance, could only hope to save his pieces, in which for that time he succeeded. The enemy in heavy force then gained the plain, and the whole front, as also that left half of the battle-field, near the mountain, which they held through the whole contest. They soon afterwards brought up a heavy battery, whose fire covered and commanded nearly the whole of this plateau. For two hours after this the fire on either side raged with unabated violence. During this time a large body of Mexican cavalry, some three thousand or more, succeeded in passing over this plain at our left, along the mountain foot, apparently with the design of attacking our camps and the trains in the rear. Davis's regiment, with Sherman and one piece of artillery, and May's squadron, were sent to watch the movements of the enemy, and guard our trains; while Marshall with his volunteer cavalry was ordered to move in this ravine, a short distance to his right, to guard our centre. But this man continued his movement to the Hacienda and the plain beyond, a mile from the battle-field, where he remained for the rest of the day, simply as a spectator of

the contest, in a good position to retire if we were routed; and neither the repeated messages of Gen. Taylor, nor his own personal solicitation made after the lull of battle, soon after mid-day, could bring him to the field again.

It was shortly after this Mexican cavalry had passed beyond our line, while the fire of the artillery on both sides was of the hottest, the plain being completely covered with smoke, that occurred one of those incidents,— those blunders, — that at times even decide the fate of battles. In this case we felt that it cost us at least the loss of these three thousand cavalry as prisoners. For as the fire slackened a little, and the smoke cleared for a few moments, a cry rose of a "message from Gen. Santa Ana;" and two Mexican officers were led forward to Gen. Taylor, who, with his staff grouped around him, was just in rear of the centre of the plateau. I noticed that they had no white flag, and was still more surprised at the message they gave in French, that "Gen. Santa Ana desired to know what Gen. Taylor wanted." Honest Gen. Taylor, without any punctilio or any wile in himself, and without suspicion of this in others, at once replied "His surrender," which was called out to them by others in French. While Gen. Wool returned with these men towards the line for a parley, Gen. Taylor at once stopped the firing in our front, and sent similar orders to our left and rear, where our reserves were engaged with that very cavalry; and thus, on the cessation of our fire, those three thousand men, except one or two small detachments, quietly passed back to their own lines unmolested under our very eyes.

Gen. Wool soon returned, and reported to Gen. Taylor, that, as he approached the enemy, those officers advanced towards their own troops and joined them; but, as the Mexicans still continued to fire upon him after this, he gave up the attempt at a parley and returned. Though few of us, if any, suspected the good faith of this strange message at the moment, I have little doubt, that these officers, being well in advance, found themselves, by the lifting of the smoke, surrounded by our men, and with ready wit at once feigned this message, "*a ver se paga*," as their phrase is,— "to see if it would pay;" and it did pay most fortunately for them, for, as they neared their own lines, they deserted Gen. Wool, and escaped; and not only this, but unwittingly on their part, by our order to stop the fire, their large body of cavalry was also saved.

Of the two detachments referred to, one body of some three or four hundred men, apparently advancing on our train, was met by Jeff Davis with his small regiment, with Sherman and a piece of artillery. After a near approach, but not an actual charge, the rifles of Davis and the canister of Sherman were too much for them, and they turned and fled to their column, escaping to their own lines. I counted seven dead Mexicans the next day at the scene of this contest. This gave his first military prestige to Davis, who was offered a general's position in our army soon after. He was wounded in the foot at this affair; and in the battle his regiment lost one hundred men out of three hundred and seventy.

The other detachment, of about two hundred and fifty only, bore down towards our dépôt at the Hacienda of Buena Vista. Here were drawn up in line Marshall (senior colonel) with

his five, and Yell with his eight companies of volunteer cavalry. The Mexicans in "column of fours," advanced moderately, halting from time to time; and Marshall, though repeatedly urged by others, could not be prevailed upon to order an advance or charge. But Yell, a brave man, but without discipline, felt the humiliation of the moment; and with passionate appeals to his men, and with most bitter, biting sarcasm upon those who held back, he succeeded in getting some sixty to join him in the charge which Marshall would not order. With these only, he advanced to meet the Mexican lancers, who now came upon him, and overwhelmed him at the charging pace, when Yell with several of his officers and men went down, and the lines of Marshall in his rear turned at once, without waiting the shock, and rushed pell-mell between and around the buildings of the ranch, followed by the Mexicans. Yell's adjutant (afterwards the lieutenant-colonel of his regiment) said afterwards of this charge, that is boasted of for our cavalry, "I was at full speed, with Mexicans on the right, left, and rear of me." This column of lancers then passed rapidly across the valley at our right and rear, rejoining their line, by passing around the gullies on our right, and being fired at by their own artillery as they approached them in our front. They suffered somewhat as they passed, from the stragglers, and the small guard of infantry on the roofs of the adobe houses; and they barely escaped destruction from a charge under May, who was approaching by the road on their flank at the moment of their charge, when his command was halted, as one of his officers, Lieut. Givens, afterwards told me, "to let the dust clear away." May soon after resumed the pursuit; but the critical moment had passed, not to return.

While this last skirmish was occurring, the battle recommenced with increased fury on the plain. It had been observed by the two Mexicans that Gen. Taylor rode a white horse, the only white horse, I believe, ridden by any officer that day except Lincoln. During the lull of our fire, a heavy battery of artillery was placed in position to cover every part of the plain; and the white horse, with the staff grouped around it, was a most conspicuous mark. I recollect at one time, as we crossed the rear ridge, in an attempt to take cover, three balls, in true line-shots, came over us in succession, as we moved from one side to the other. The firing down hill without doubt saved Gen. Taylor. We learned afterwards that this was a battery commanded by Capt. Riley, formerly a sergeant of our infantry, who had deserted our army at Matamoras, and who had been promised a lieutenant-colonelcy if he succeeded in killing or disabling Gen. Taylor. Riley was subsequently captured on Scott's line; and though unusual efforts, even petitions of large numbers of the ladies of Mexico, were made to save him, he was tried and sentenced. Under the immediate direction of Twiggs (who subsequently became a far greater traitor to his country) he was severely branded as a deserter, while some seventy other such deserters were hung, at the first wave of our flag over Chapultepec. Riley's life was saved, on the plea that he deserted just before the actual date of the declaration of war.

It was during the severe enfilading fire, that the gallant Harden, who had a regiment in admirable discipline, came up to Gen. Taylor to beg that he might be allowed to charge,

and capture that battery; and, grasping his hand warmly with the exclamation, "You are our regulars!" I joined in urging his request. But the General felt that it was scarcely safe to assault them; and he remarked to me, as Harden turned away, "I know Harden would go; but I do not know what his men would do: they have never been under fire. If I only had one regiment of regulars, I would order this charge." Nor is it perhaps too much to say, that if he had had the troops, to order such a charge, it would probably have been, like all our other daring charges on the Mexicans, successful; and the total rout of all that army, with the loss of all its war-material and camp-equipage, must have been the result. With such a result, these troops and this material, instead of being safely and quietly withdrawn in the night, as was the case, would never have formed the nucleus of the force that met Gen. Scott at Cerro Gordo; even more, there would have been no Cerro Gordo. Had there been one regiment of regulars at Buena Vista, Gen. Scott could have marched almost unopposed into the valley, if not even into the city of Mexico; and, though the military fame of that chieftain would not have been as great, the bloodshed and slaughter on that line that gave him his success would have been immensely less.

Towards noon, and during the rage of the battle upon the plain, when orders were sent to the rear for assistance from the reserves, I met Lieut. (now Gen.) Kilburn, as he was attempting to ascend the plateau with a section of Bragg's battery; which had been sent to our rear at the time of danger there. These guns had moved rapidly to the right and left, to meet the expected attacks over a wide space in our rear; and this celerity of our artillery in moving to different points had so astonished the enemy as to give them the impression of our having a vastly superior force in this respect. But Kilburn's horses were now entirely exhausted, and unable to move the pieces; upon seeing which, I told him I would get him other animals. Calling his sergeant, I rode off to Major Washington, and appealed to him for fresh teams for these guns, which were at once given by this noble old soldier; so that this section for a second time joined in this morning's fight on the plateau. The fresh horses played a still more important part in the afternoon for their battery and its commander.

Soon after this, or about mid-day, and after some three hours of almost continuous fire, the rage of war on the earth was silenced for the time by a greater conflict of the elements from the heavens above; for a most violent storm of rain and even hail poured down upon us in torrents for some fifteen or twenty minutes, completely silencing the strife of the contending armies. Some three to four hours later in the afternoon, after a second long-continued firing of the artillery on both sides during the last fatal charge, a second such shower of rain poured down upon us, and closed the contest; while a slighter shower had fallen on the night of the twenty-second, just after the lesser battle in the mountain. Now, as not a drop of rain had fallen there for many months previously, and none fell again, as I personally know, for at least two to three months after this battle, I think we may consider these instances to be conclusive evidence that the firing of cannon produces rain even in dry seasons.

Just previous to this shower, and while the fire was raging at the hottest, Gen. Wool, a man personally as brave as Gen. Taylor himself (though other impressions had been given me before the battle), in an excess of caution, and in fear of a defeat, had urged on Gen. Taylor to send, or let him send, an order to Capt. Washington to have his battery got ready for a retreat; and Gen. Taylor very doubtfully yielding, Wool sent his aid, Lieut. (now Gen.) McDowell, from whom I had the facts, down to Washington to give the order. The horses were at once attached to the pieces; and one gun, by the mistake of a sergeant, had actually started towards the rear. But they were ordered back by brave old Washington, who vowed he would not move till he had the positive orders of Gen. Taylor. A very few minutes after, Major Bliss (Taylor's adjutant-general) came down, and ordered them "to limber up, to be prepared to go to the front;" and when Washington said, "I thought we were defeated, from the order just now received," Bliss replied, "On the contrary, Gen. Taylor thinks they are pretty badly whipped; and he wants you to be ready to pursue them."

I understood that this order was afterwards forgotten or denied by Gen. Wool; but it was an order, which, if known to the volunteer troops, would at once have caused their retreat, and of course their utter rout under the circumstances. I cannot doubt that Gen. Taylor yielded for the moment only to the urgings of this old veteran officer, his second in command, from the kindness of his nature; but immediately after, to prevent the danger which he foresaw with his raw troops, he sent down Bliss with a counter-order and a message even of false hope, as I must feel sure it was. I mention this fact as one of the accidents by which the results of the battle might have been changed.

After the storm, the Mexicans having for some time appeared to rest quietly, the generals and their staffs indulged themselves in a little rest and refreshment. While troops were changed in position, — brought up to near the plateau, and at the heads of the ravines, to be ready for any new assault, and the batteries, in part at least, descended to the centre position, near the pass, to forage their horses, — Gen. Taylor, whom no personal urging had before prevailed upon to dismount from his white horse for safety, exchanged that animal for another, — a favorite "clay-bank pacer." He at once visited the ranch and trains, to inspect their condition, and see to their safety. He also went to the cavalry under Marshall, then near the ranch, and commanded, urged, and implored him to come up close to the plain, to be ready to assist us, begging him in the homely farmer's phrase, though with inverted meaning, to "stand up to his fodder, rack or no rack." But all his efforts were in vain; for I recollect hours after, during the last conflict, the General told me to look with my glass, and tell him what men those were in our rear, beyond the ranch. I could only answer, "I see they are our cavalry, as they are not in uniform;" when his earnest, feeling exclamation was, "I wish in God's name they would only come up and show themselves. I would not ask them to fight." It was also about this time, or near the middle of the day, that Gen. Miñon, with a large cavalry-force which had been sent round by a mule-path beyond the high mountains on our left, to threat-

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en our train and dépôt at Saltillo, had succeeded in crossing those mountains by a most wild and dangerous path, and approached our rear, as if to cut off our communication with the town. Upon this, an officer of Major Webster, who commanded the redoubt overlooking Saltillo, Lieut. (now Gen.) Donaldson, moved out with one piece of artillery. Lieut. Shover, with another piece from our train-guard, joined him; and they both gallantly approached and shelled this large body of cavalry without a single bayonet or sabre other than those of their artillerists to protect them. To their own astonishment — in fact, to escape the fire of these two pieces — the whole brigade of Miñon turned back, and retraced their steps over the mountain-path. And thus closed all battle in our rear; although we had good reason afterwards to feel assured that several thousand guerillas were still beyond them, to cut off all stragglers, in case of our defeat.

To return to our main position. About this time, between one and two, P.M., the two generals, Taylor and Wool, with most of the staff-officers, had collected near our central position, in rear of Washington's battery, reporting and gathering information; while some jests were passed round in spite of the anxieties of the hour. Among others, a bet was fastened on me by Garnet, Taylor's aid, for looking with eyes too large upon a shell filled with musket-balls that an hour or two before had passed uncomfortably near me, while I was sitting quietly in the saddle, carelessly exposed, with a full side-view offered to the enemy. The bet was on the diameter of this seven-inch shell; and I lost it by a quarter of an inch. The wager was faithfully paid the next day. (I will not say how, in this region of the Maine law.) I could not but think sadly of the occurrence thirteen years after, when the winner of that bet lay before me at Corrick's Ford, his last fight over, with a rebel star upon his shoulder.

As we soon saw much movement in the troops of the enemy on our front, along the road, Gen. Taylor directed me to ascend a knoll, just in the rear of our centre, to reconnoitre. When, after a few minutes, I reported to him that the enemy appeared to be retiring in large numbers, he at once mounted, with his staff, and moved round to ascend the plain. I continued at the hill, and a short time after observed that they appeared to be wavering or halting in their retreat, of which I sent notice immediately up to the general, by a horseman resting at the hill-foot; soon after, seeing them return on the road towards us in considerable force, I left the hill, and remounted to join and report this at once to the general.

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Upon reaching the plateau, I found the contest raging with all the force of the early morning strife. From the facts, as gathered then and immediately after, I should judge that the enemy, though holding in force the left and front of our original position on the plateau, and commanding this plain, were still uncertain or undecided about another attack upon us, while we held this plain by the heads of the valleys on our right, and the ravine in rear of our centre; though they held, with a great force of infantry, the first valley on our front (between the thumb and forefinger of the suggested model), they still had actually commenced a withdrawal of a portion of their troops. Soon after Gen. Taylor came upon the plain, an attack on our side, probably in the

belief of this withdrawal, was ordered and made by the three regiments that held the heads of the two main valleys. Harden's and Bissell's Illinois, and McKee's Kentucky regiments, some fifteen hundred men in all, which were supported in rear by three guns under Lieut. O'Brien, one of the most noble, gallant men on that field.

These men moved forward in an echelon line towards the next valley, just above referred to; the existence of which, from the clearness of the atmosphere, they could not suspect even, the whole succession of ridges in front appearing as but a simple plain. But as they neared this ravine, within some fifty to eighty yards only, an immense force of some five thousand to seven thousand men suddenly rose as it were from the open earth upon them, "six to seven lines deep," as one officer stated to me, and outflanking them in both directions. There was nothing then for them, but "*Sauve qui peut;*" and our men fled to the rear as best they could, a large part taking refuge and escaping down the first valley to their right, just in rear of our former lookout spur, and down this valley also, on either side, passed the Mexicans in full pursuit. It seems they sent word to their cavalry to meet our men at the mouth of the valley, near the road, and thus holding the broken regiments completely caught in a *cul-de-sac;* and the work of massacre began, and finished only when no more were left for slaughter. Survivors who escaped related to me that they saw parties of our men giving up their arms and bowing low, even kneeling in Mexican fashion, to surrender to the cavalry, who, while retaining their arms, called to their infantry to shoot them. Col. Bissell told me, that, finding a narrow gulley of six or eight feet deep, he took to that for safety, at the same time calling to McKee and Clay, retreating on the hillside to his right, to take that cover also. Bissell kept this shelter till near the road, when a run of one hundred yards brought him under the cover of Washington's guns. Col. McKee continued on the exposed hillside, and was killed. Lieut.-Col. Clay, at first wounded, was carried off by three of his men, whom he begged would leave him and save themselves; but the noble fellows still bore him on, till all were slaughtered in cold blood. Col. Harden had all but escaped, when he was seen at the very top and end of the next spur, in front of his own men, then under Richardson, in conflict with a lancer; and when they went out to bring in his body a few minutes after, they found the dead lancer and his horse beside him, and the lance half cut off by Harden's sword: that sword was gone, but the scabbard still remained belted to the waist, as they had not time to take it. Within half an hour after, I saw the body of that gallant officer, with the lance and scabbard, laid upon the ground in the tent where Jeff Davis was lying with his wounded foot. One man, and one man only, was saved here that they had power to kill; he was afterwards my trainmaster, after his discharge from Bissell's regiment. He told me he had taken cover, and thought, "they had just got in good shooting distance," when he saw that no one of his regiment was near him. Turning to run, he was met by two Mexicans with unloaded guns, one of whom struck at him with the bayonet, the other with the breech of his piece, when an officer approached, and, knocking up their muskets, called out "dollar" to him. He at once handed him a belt with sixty dollars in it; and this officer then

and afterwards saved his life. The men had been paid but a few days before the fight; and many of them had hundreds of dollars even on their persons, which made it impossible for the wounded to escape, as is often done, feigning death; for the search for this plunder was too vigilant to be deceived.

The portion of our men that were forced directly to the rear on the plain without being near enough to take cover in the ravine, were followed closely by another party of this overwhelming force, up to the very muzzles of O'Brien's pieces, all three of which they captured, after that gallant officer had abandoned them, limping off, himself wounded, with but a single artillerist remaining with him. Lieut. Franklin (now Gen.) saw a Mexican officer deliberately ride up to the head horse of one of the guns, and, taking him by the bridle, turn him round, and thus capture the piece. But this hitherto resistless return charge was now met by another fire still more resistless as it proved, — that of the guns of Bragg and Sherman, which reached the plain at the most opportune moment. These batteries, as previously stated, had been resting and recruiting in the ravine below, when, as those regiments moved forward to the charge, Capt. (now Gen.) I. H. Eaton, Gen. Taylor's aid, came down to order them forward to the plain, urging them with, "The general wants you: up, up, or you will be too late!" Both batteries sprang forward, and the fresh horses of Bragg took the lead; and, in the narrow practicable roadway, the senior officer, Sherman had to follow in rear; but he rose the plain close upon Bragg, throwing his line forward at an angle with him, when both poured a cross-fire over the same ground, which repelled this last impetuous charge of the enemy, "and thereby saved the day," an achievement unjustly attributed to Bragg alone in the official report. I say unjustly; but it is the only injustice that I am aware of that the good Gen. Taylor has ever even appeared to be responsible for. It was unjust towards Sherman; for he had previously been kept by a positive and very unjust order from the command of his own company (then under Bragg, his actual lieutenant), at Monterey. Again, as Bragg first rose the plain with his pieces, probably he alone was then seen by Bliss; and his favoring mind held Bragg only in view in the making up of the reports to the general.

It was at this time that the remark was made which was changed to become so famous, "A little more grape, Capt. Bragg," so apt and useful afterwards for orations, and for dinners to this officer. As the captain reached the plain, seeing no infantry near, he rode to Gen. Taylor, saying, "I have no support; they will take my pieces." And the General replied, "They will take them anyhow, fire away;" adding, as Bragg told me, unluckily for the poetry of the story, "Give 'em hell, Bragg." How well this injunction was obeyed, the shattered ranks of the assailants bore ample witness. The whole force was suddenly driven back with great slaughter. I counted nine dead the next morning in one group,—heap, I may say,—and scores of others lying near, under the cross-fire of this artillery.

I may here mention that serious doubts existed afterwards as to authority of the order for that last fatal charge; it being stated that Gen. Taylor had denied that he gave such orders, and much feeling arose among the officers of the regiments that suffered against the person who bore the

order, Capt. Chilton (since the rebel adjutant-general of Lee)."

This officer, whatever peculiarities of character he might have, was a man of undoubted gallantry and truth; and he sacredly vouched to Major Mansfield, who told me within a day or two, that Gen. Taylor did most assuredly give him the order for this charge. The careful major cautioned him, as a young captain, not to insist upon this against the General's denial. I cannot doubt that the good old General did really issue this order while in the excitement of the moment; possibly it did not rest upon his mind: it was an order, that, but for the opportune arrival of our artillery, would have insured our destruction. I was told by those who witnessed the interview, that the brave but impulsive Harden was, at about that time, most earnestly urging upon Cols. Bissell and McKee to join him in making such a charge; these officers at length, still doubtful, assenting, though I was assured the order also reached them before their own proposed movement could be carried out.

This last bloody strife, again stilled by another violent shower, closed the contest for the day. But an hour or two after, or a short time before sunset, we saw their heavy battery at the upper part of the plain limbered up as if for a movement, supported by some three thousand to four thousand infantry, which we feared were arranging for a final overwhelming charge upon us. Gen. Taylor sent me over to the spur on our right, near the road, to get the battalion of Richardson to move up the ridge to be ready to assist the broken remnants of their own, Harden's, and the other regiments, to resist the expected assaults. With great difficulty, and only after directing their officers to take the list of those reporting as tired, sick, or wounded, I at length succeeded in getting them out of their slight breastwork, and partly up the ridge, to be nearer at least, and in time to aid in case of need, should this force (which I was closely watching with my glass) move down to the attack, which fortunately they did not attempt, upon our shattered lines.

Here, again, the Providence above, or our good fortune, saved us from the effects of another blunder, — an order given by our other old general, Wool. While we were in this suspense, and awaiting what we feared was the final grand attack, Gen. Wool sent an order to May, with his dragoons and the spy company, some two hundred and thirty in all, to attack that heavy force, when Mansfield rushed up to him, and urged him to revoke the order, "if he would not destroy us, as we had no support for such a charge, if they were driven back." The general then countermanded it. This the major told me at our own mess a day or two after. There were disputes about this order also, and publications by Col. May denying its receipt. But there can be no doubt it was given and countermanded. The bearer of the order, the interpreter, Addicks, a former Texan officer, told me he carried it; and I heard Wool state to Jeff Davis, who was lying wounded in the hospital, that he sent it. I told the actual facts to Davis soon after, receiving a caution as to the impolicy of truth-telling always. And a former Texan surgeon, Irvine, in the spy company, told me that he heard it delivered, and that, turning to his companions, he said, "Good-by, boys," with the feeling that this was to be the last of all of them.

I mention these circumstances to show some of the confusions and mis-

takes ever incident to these contests; so that I have ever since then characterized battles as but a series of blunders, when he who happened to blunder the least must win the victory. They show, at least, how often, and on what slight chances, our salvation hung during those two days of bitter strife.

No further movement was now made by either side, until the sun set and the night closed in, when, after the placing of our pickets, the different groups of our shattered regiments, having food and water brought to them, for the most part lay in bivouac in their positions at the heads of the ravines, and near the edge of the plain. Gen. Taylor, from the exhaustion of his troops, declined to order a night attack upon the enemy, although it was again suggested.

After visiting the outposts near midnight, I lay down in the bitter cold, just outside the tent where were Davis and other wounded officers, with Harden. I could scarcely rest, till roused up about three o'clock by the cheering news that Capt. Prentiss, with four heavy guns and his lieutenants (now generals) Rickets and Doubleday, had by a forced march since the previous night passed over nearly sixty miles from Monterey to join us. Gen. Taylor at once ordered them from Saltillo to re-enforce us on the field. The satisfaction was intense with which we found we had our lost guns replaced, even in greater force.

As daylight approached, I began to strengthen the breastwork at the centre, near Washington's battery, taking the wagons from the roadway, where they had been left to be ready for a rapid charge forward, if we should wish to make it; and I now attempted to cover the whole front by a new parapet of earth, well satisfied that now we could make no such forward charge.

While these preparations for a final defence were being made, at the earliest daylight, there came a faint and uncertain rumor that no enemy could be seen on the plain above. Then these reports grew more confirmed, till at length, fifteen or twenty minutes after, men came rushing in with the welcome intelligence that they had been a long distance in advance, and that no enemy was to be seen, that the whole army of Santa Ana had retired during the night.

By this time, our old officers were all up, and out of the two or three tents pitched near Washington's battery; and Gen. Wool rushed up to Gen. Taylor, embracing him with both arms, with the exclamation, "My God, sir, you are the greatest man in the country: you will be President of the United States!" Col. Belknap (father of the present Secretary of War) then embraced Col. Whiting, the quartermaster-general; and this amusement soon became general, our older officers generally joining in these hearty congratulations much more than the junior.

In a few minutes, Gen. Taylor directed me to order the batteries down to refresh the men and horses, and be prepared to make pursuit. I then moved forward with McCullough to reconnoitre the route. The cavalry near us were pushed on for some six or eight miles, to Encantada, when it was found that the withdrawal of the enemy, which must have commenced with the earliest darkness, was complete, with the bulk of all his war material and trains, then already passed beyond the valley of the Agua Nueva even, leaving only the dead and wounded, and a few stragglers,

with the *débris* of his camp-equipage, as our spoils of the victory.

Their dead were some three hundred to four hundred; and their severely wounded left behind amounted to perhaps double that number, with two hundred to three hundred stragglers. We found here also the evidences of their cruelty in the bodies of our men shot through the head, after apparent struggles to retreat with lesser wounds, from mile to mile on this route.

The hatred, horror even, with which these people had been taught to think of us, was well shown by a little incident in this scout. As McCullough and myself were working our way through the *chapparal* (or scrub-oak brush) some five or six miles in advance to our left of Encantada, we came across a poor, exhausted Mexican woman, lost in the retreat of their army. She was sitting under a bush, by her pony, whose saddle she had removed from its severely galled back. I have her in my mind's eye now, a most beautiful woman, of some twenty-five years, with large, liquid hazel eyes, and full round cheeks, with but the faintest tint of the Indian shade. She was neatly and modestly dressed, wearing kid gloves with the tips of the fingers cut off. She would scarcely speak to us at first; but at length, to our questions, admitted she had lost her way, that her *marido* was killed in battle the day before, and that she was famishing for food and water. I offered her food, but she refused it; coffee from my canteen, filled just before, and telling her it was 'café,' only 'café,' and still she refused it, until I raised it to my lips and drank a little, when she seized it, and gorged the whole of it at a draught. I then gave her *piloncillo*, the sugar-cakes of the country, and some crackers, which she took, then for the first time looking up most gratefully. We could not but suppose that she had feared we would poison her; for it was by such ideas that the ignorant Mexicans were induced so readily to murder us all. Such a barbarity might well be expected from these savages, who, as I learned, after capturing wagons loaded with our wounded about the time of their attack upon the Mississippi regiment, had deliberately thrown these poor sufferers out of the wagons, and murdered them in cold blood.

The cavalry squadrons under Capt. Albert Pike (since too well known to our country), with the companies of regular dragoons under Lieuts. Rucker and Carleton, (the latter subsequently on the staff of Gen. Wool, and the historian of this battle,) as they found no prospect of reaching the enemy by a successful pursuit, soon returned from their reconnoissance; and our main efforts were at once directed to the care of the wounded, and the gathering in of our heroic dead. Of less than three thousand noble men who stood their ground, over one-fourth, or seven hundred and fifty, had fallen; and of these, over one-third, or more than two hundred and seventy, were dead; a slaughter unexampled in the history of battle-fields, and far beyond that of our former bloodiest contest, Lundy's Lane, where, with nearly the same force, the dead were over one hundred less.

But the enemy was repelled, his army shattered and hurled back to their own capital, our position was held, and the field of Buena Vista won by this gallant band of volunteers against ten times their numbers of mostly veteran troops. And Gen. Taylor, unambitious but to do right, an honest, reliable, well-judging soldier,

holding these qualities in common with Grant and with Thomas, more than any three prominent officers of the army I have ever known, became the next president of the United States.

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